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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001897

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: HAMAS BREAKS UP FRIDAY PUBLIC PRAYERS, BEATS
DEMONSTRATORS AND ARRESTS FATAH LEADERS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Despite a Hamas ban on public prayers and measures to prevent large gatherings, thousands of Palestinians assembled in Gaza's major cities September 7, attempting to hold Friday prayers that double as anti-Hamas demonstrations. According to Arabic media and local contacts, several thousand Hamas supporters backed by Executive Force (EF) gunmen blocked access to the city squares and other intended prayer sites, leading to at least 25 injuries from EF gunfire and clubs (including several journalists beaten by the EF for trying to cover the incidents) and dozens of arrests. President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) issued a statement calling for non-violent resistance against Hamas and avoiding pretexts for "the coup forces to carry out all kinds of crimes and oppression against our people." End summary.

Gazans Gather for Public Prayers;
Hamas Reacts Brutally, Arrests Dozens

¶2. (SBU) Despite a Hamas ban on public prayers and EF measures to prevent large gatherings, thousands of Palestinians assembled in Gaza City/Jabaliya, Dayr al-Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafah mid-day September 7, attempting to hold Friday prayers that double as anti-Hamas demonstrations, according to Arabic-language media and local contacts. In Gaza City, several thousand Hamas supporters backed by EF gunmen blocked access to the main square near al-Azhar University and the Unknown Soldier Tomb, leading to scuffles and several injuries, including journalists beaten by the EF for trying to cover the incidents. (Note: Regional Arabic media, including al-Jazeera, filmed EF members beating protesters and have aired the footage. End note). Also in Gaza City, the EF shot and injured a Fatah member in Jabaliya while dispersing a crowd trying to hold outdoor prayers, and shut down Anwar al-Aziz mosque.

¶3. (C) According to Gaza City civil society activist Ibrahim Surani, many Palestinians were too frightened to attend prayer gatherings. Surani reports many Gazans received SMS messages "if you go to pray outside, you will not find sticks but death waiting for you."⁸

¶4. (SBU) In central Gaza (Nussayrat Camp, Dayr al-Balah), three Palestinians were shot and several others beaten with clubs when several hundred demonstrators attempted to bypass EF roadblocks. In Khan Yunis, the EF shot and injured 13 Palestinians, closed two major mosques, and beat a Muslim preacher trying to lead outdoor prayers, according to Gaza contacts and local media. In Rafah, clashes erupted when the EF blocked demonstrators from moving to the city's main square and severely beat three Palestinians.

Abbas Urges Gazans to Avoid Violence

15. (SBU) President Mahmud Abbas issued a statement at 1100 local on September 7 calling for non-violent resistance against Hamas. He asked "our people to avoid any conflict with the armed militias of the coup elements (i.e., Hamas), as these forces carry out all kinds of crimes and oppression against our people." Outdoord prayers were held at the Muqata'a in Ramallah. Both the President's address and the sermon at Friday prayers at the Muqata'a contained strong anti-Hamas messages.

WALLES